

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **DeNUCCI SAYS STATE SHOULD ASSUME COSTS OF SPECIAL ED FOR CERTAIN ABANDONED CHILDREN**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci today urged the state Department of Education to seek full state funding of special education for children who are wards of the state and attend private day and residential schools.

DeNucci made his recommendation in a report that was prompted by a situation in which the state billed the town of Holbrook for \$40,000 in educational costs for a special-education child who had not lived there for over seven years. There are currently 147 such children who have been placed in day or residential schools, but the \$3.8 million appropriation in the state Department of Education can only pay for the education of 70 of these children. Another \$2.9 million is needed to pay for the remaining 77 abandoned children, but in the absence of adequate state funding, DOE regulations require such costs to be borne by communities where the child's parent or legal guardian was last known to have lived.

"As wards of the state, these young people have unique educational needs and all of them deserve to be funded by the state," said DeNucci.

DeNucci's report revealed that there may already be other sources of funding. For example, DeNucci said DOE, in fiscal year 2000, reverted \$2 million from another account for reimbursement to cities and towns for the educational costs of children placed in a school district other than in his or her home town. "There is no reason why the Department of Education can't seek legislative approval to use any unspent funds from this account to pay for the needs of more of these children," said DeNucci.

In addition, DeNucci said, DOE should work with the administration and Legislature to seek to remove restrictive language preventing it from seeking supplemental appropriations when the abandoned children account runs out of funds.

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Moreover, DeNucci recommended that DOE develop written regulations defining when the state should bear the educational costs of abandoned children. The present regulations only speak to the responsibilities of cities and towns but not the state. DeNucci said that by clearly defining the state's responsibilities in its regulations, the Department of Education can make a stronger case for adequate funding of this program.

DeNucci conducted his review after the Holbrook problem was brought to his attention by Senator Michael W. Morrissey and Representatives Ronald Mariano and Joseph Sullivan.

"The state has a moral responsibility to provide for the educational needs of these youngsters who, through no fault of their own, have been placed in such unfortunate circumstances," concluded DeNucci.

